CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre Diary

Broadway business continues to be bad, with only Wonderful Town and Can-Can reporting sell-outs nightly. Tryouts of scripts this week in summer theatres include Nathaniel Benchley's Frogs of Spring at Falmouth and Ned Armstrong's See You Tomorrow at Putnam County Playhouse.

Strawhat tryouts

The Voyage of the Ark, Harold Winston's adaption of Andre Obey's Noah, was panned by Grif,Variety, as amateurish even by off-Broadway standards. Except for a fine performance by Sam Jaffe, cast in White Barn Theatre,Westport,Conn. rated no praise. ...Add 2 more "con" notices to the tryout file of What About Maisie, which debuted at Westport,Conn,Country Playhouse. Lewis,Cue,blamed the lack of a distinghishing style, plus a lack of an overall acting pattern by the cast and director of the Beth and Francis Bellamy adaption of the Henry James novelette. While Dash, Women's Wear rated it as an inordinately stilted period piece,written in dialog that is wooden and lacking in power to create sympathy...Leland Hayward's pan notice of the Bermuda Theatre revue Stock In Trade in Variety was labeled unfair by Roger E M Whitaker of the New Yorker staff,in a note to the trade journal. Producer should have known,letter states,that Equity cast headed by Alice Pearce,Jean Caples and Betty Oakes,made the show smooth,highly entertaining summer theatre fare.

London Report

3 London plays, including British versions of 2 American hits and a revival of a 17th Century tragedy,are highly rated by Watts,Post. John Gielgud's production of Thomas Otway's classic Venice Perserv'd reveals the actor-producer as the most distinghished English speaking actor in the world. 200 year old script staged by Peter Brook,he found,still has force,validity and steady interest as a tragedy. American cast in London's Guys and Dolls, Watts notes, is giving as bright and generally delightful performances abroad as it did in NY opening night. Vivian Blaine, Sam Levine, Tom Pedi, Johnny Silver and Stubby Kaye head the US contingent. The later steals the show nightly with his rendition of "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat." Diana Lynn is scoring a justifiable London triumph in The Moon is Blue,the critic reports. American actress is giving a lovely performance,the NY critic lauded,at once touching romantic and humorous.

Hits Revisited

South Pacific continues as kingpin of the musicals,cheers Gene,Variety. Current leads, Martha Wright and George Britton, make an amiable combo, mugg okayed. Though he did think Wright could project more in the vocals. Charter members of the cast and relative newcomers alike,he noted, showed no sluffoff tendencies. Myron McCormick's timing seems actually to have improved.

Canada Shakespeare Festival

Time magazine critic adds his approval to Stratfort,Ontario productions of Richard III and All's Well That Ends Well. Alec Guinness and Irene Worth do best in the latter production staged in modern dress by Tyrone Guthrie,critic comments. Staging of the shows in the small town was rated a minor miracle by the reviewer.

Village Theatre

Originals Only current production, One Foot To The Sea, was tabbed as one of the group's best by Rice,Post,in a special letter to Tom Hill. The Post drama editor recently suffered a heart attack after viewing the Village play. Though he didn't get to file a review, Rice,who is now a patient at Medical Arts Center Hospital,noted in the letterthat the subject of unnatural love in Harold Levitt's play is handled in a straight forward manner,yet with complete taste and emotional power.

The Home of the Brave is the current bill produced at ProvincetownPlayhouse by BBP Repertory Productions.Cast includes Clet Gundy,Dennis Robertson,jr and Mort Segal. It will continue through Aug 2 .

Off Broadway

American Lyric Theatre, which presented original one act plays as part of their program, folded...Burlap Summer Theatre,presenting original one act Negro plays at 437 Lenox Ave week-ends will end their run next week...A Doll's House is being presented at Jan Hus House on week-ends by Rhoda Handler and Rose Lynch. ...Pinocchio will be presented for 6 performances by Kay Rockefeller at YMHA Jul 27-29 at 11 AM and 2 30 PM...Albert Dekker will debut with his program of readings July 29-30 at Dobbs Ferry Playhouse.

Vaudeville

Palace bill headed by Mickey Deems, with Dolinoff,Raya Sisters,Tom Parris Trio,Moke & Poke,Adriane and Dale,Billy Romano and Betty Brett.

Trade paper reporters raved over current Paramount show featuring Les Paul and Mary Ford. Variety and Billboard men also okayed comedians Tim Herbert and Don Saxon on current bill.

Maude Adams Obits

4 NY editorial page tributes honored Maude Adams,who died last week. At the present writing none of the NY drama critics and/or trade journals have commented on the famed "Peter Pan."

TIMES--She was loved for what she was. A whole generation loved her. They went on loving the memory of her after she entered into her long retirement.She survives in the parts that were her favorites-Lady Babbie,Maggie Wylie and Pan.

HERALD TRIBUNE--She struck a genuine note in her day,with simplicity,purity and grace. The spirit of youth is everlastingly fresh. She symbolized it for a moment,and she will not be forgotten.

WORLD TELEGRAM & SUN--Few stars of the theatre have drawn greater acclaim than she, and hardly any ever held it so long. The American theatre will never forget her.

JOURNAL AMERICAN--She infused the living magic of the theatre into the whimsicality,freshness and delicate humor of Barrie's plays. She had a triumphant career until she choose to end it, and in her retirement she found peace.

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Green Room Department

COOL VENICE...Few shows get reviewed on the editorial pages of the NY dailies. But Mike Todd's A Night in Venice won rave notices from the editorial page writers of the Herald Tribune and Mirror. Summer in NY is the better for this imaginative entertainment, comments the former. While the latter rated it as the kind of show that has something for everybody's taste. Both agreed that it is the coolest show on or off Broadway.

SUMMER BLAME...Strawhat managers have only themselves to blame for high production costs, reminds Coleman, Mirror. They disbanded or neglected their resident companies for visiting "names", forgetting that the summer theatre started as a place of opportunity for talented newcomers. Critic would like to see the enterprising managers use more imagination, developing new talent rather than relying on shopworn scripts and jaded "names."

COLUMN TIP...Most fascinating blind item in a column in years is reported by Kilgallen. It seems a once important Broadway producer, now "inextricably linked" with the pinkos, tells friends his funds are so low he may take a job as a NY cabbie, the columnist hears.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Another major theatre war, perhaps rivaling the Shubert-Klaw & Erlanger battle of 20 years ago, is seen by Hobe, Variety, as the possible outgrowth of the new Dowling-Stevens-Whitehead combine...Theatre needs more old blood than it has been getting, complains Chapman, News. He fears too many experienced theatre people are not busy. His list includes Robert E Sherwood, Elmer Rice, Irving Berlin, Noel Coward and Thornton Wilder.

"MAIN" PREVIEW...First comment on "Main Street to Broadway" film, which will be seen in NY at the Astor after the run of "Stalag 17", is from Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun. He thought the main story was pretty flat and corny, the whole thing rather a conglomeration. Though it left him disenchanted, he did think that the film, with its glimpses of the theatre's great, may be an across America gold mine. A percentage of the film's profits go to the Council of the Living Theatre.

INTERVIEW HI-LITE...Any actor who calls himself an actor is stage-struck rather than film struck, Alec Guinness told Sheaffer, Eagle, at the Canadian Shakespeare Festival , Actor sees no real difference between stage and film acting. It is just that one is chopped up. He admitted that he is looking for an exciting new play, but only seems to receive plays written by vicars' daughters, plays about Shelley and Keats by repressed ladies.

CRITIC vs DIRECTOR... As a director Harold Clurman has always had a low estimate of how critics rate the director's work. In his current Nation article, the critic-director points out that the reviewer speaks only of what he judges the worth of the play text might have been if he could possibly contemplate it apart from its production. While the director sees the play script as a potential.

Pros & Cons by TMK

As if the theatre didn't have enough trouble a Variety mugg predicts a "major war" between the Shuberts and the new theatre combine. We can only hope that this political commentator is wrong, and that "peace" is allowed to break out instead.

"New Moon" recording (Decca) with Thomas Hayward and Jane Wilson is a delightful rendition of the hit filled Romberg-Hammerstein operetta. It is a tribute to the authors that the music and lyrics remain fresh after 25 years.

NYC Theatre News Round Up

Broadway, which has a habit of expanding its borders in summer, takes to 3 D films this week in Chicago and Los Angeles. 2 recent Broadway musicals are being filmed by independent film producers, with the original Broadway producers receiving a large percentage of the profits. NY producers, who have almost priced themselves out of the sale of theatre properties to the large West coast film companies, are studying the latest development with interest.

In Chicago, Leonard Sillman is having his intimate revue hit New Faces lensed by independent film producer Bermit Swartiz. The original Broadway cast featuring Eartha Kitt, Ronnie Graham and Robert Clary are included in the 3 D color film which is being made during the day this week of the show's final week in Chicago. While in Hollywood, Paula Stone and Michael Sloane have joined Joe Justman and Gene Towne, independent film producers, to film via 3 D technicolor their Broadway and tour success Top Banana. Last week the pre-recording of the dialogue and songs was cut, and this week the production will be filmed on an arena stage. Phil Silvers and Rose Marie head the original Broadway cast.

The protests of NY theatre men and unions against the Mason Tax Bill, which would repeal the 20% tax on motion picture admissions, but ignore the 20% tax on legitimate theatre admissions, were to no avail. The bill passed the House of Representatives by a voice vote. But as the repeal of the federal tax would cost the government $100,000,000 per year in revenues, Washington believes the President will veto it.

An ambitious program to run a $1 million theatre corporation along business like methods was announced. The new production combine includes Robert Dowling, president of City Investing Corp, Roger Stevens, president of the Empire State Building, and Robert Whitehead, producer of the recent ANTA Playhouse series. The group will produce plays and also manage the Coronet, Fulton and Morosco theatres. Certain plays will be produced in cooperation with the Playwrights Company, of which Stevens is a member, and a repertory company presenting limited engagements of classics is forseen.

Plays

First play be anew author in the 1953-54 season will be Edmund Morris The Wooden Dish. The author, a painter -actor, will have his script produced by Aldrich & Myers Oct 12 at the Morosco, with Herman Shumlin directing...Escapade, acurrent London hit, will be presented in Nov by Alfred de Liagre, Jr and Roger Stevens, with Ursula Jeans and Roger Livesey of the original cast...Carnival in Flanders has a new director, Preston Sturgis has replaced Bretaigne Windust.

People

Bill Penn, who just completed a tour with Stalag 17, made his Broadway debut in 5th Season, replacing Dick Kallman who withdrew to fulfill night club engagements... Audrey Christie has been engaged as "stand-by" for Rosalind Russell in Wonderful Town...Gregory Ratoff will direct and appear in Seventh Heaven musical...Lenore Ulric will return to the stage in Norman Rosten's Mardi Gras.

Theatre Obits

Maude Adams, 80, the famed "Peter Pan", died...James W. Elliott, 63, producer of The Bat died...Leo Chazel, 53, a founder of the Houston Playhouse and a veteran Broadway actor, died...Florence Forsberg, 25, understudy to Edith Adams in Wonderful Town, was murdered by a Korean war veteran who took his own life.

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